

Chapter 6: Resounding Change

"In this manner wanes the slow night amid threat, uncertainty and bloodshed. On every block the steady tramp of guards is heard. As the yellow lamplight pales in the gray morning, the negroes failed to re-appear on the streets." Raleigh News and Observer, 11/13/1898

As night fell on November 10, thousands of men, women and children in Wilmington knew their lives had been forever changed by the Democrats in their quest for victory in the election of 1898. The violence that erupted as a result of Democratic Party machinations fractured the relatively peaceful and progressive city of Wilmington. Many in the city's African American community feared for their lives. Bipartisan politics was dead, and the city soon returned to post-Reconstruction status quo, with wealthy Democrats running county and municipal government. As the end of November approached with the Thanksgiving holiday, families in Wilmington either rejoiced or recuperated.¹ A hostile environment, unfriendly to non-Democrats of either race, persisted. African Americans fared much worse than their white Fusion counterparts. They faced the coming winter with little prospect of improvement, reductions in pay and job availability, and increased blatant racism on a daily basis.

In the immediate aftermath of the violence of November 10, the paramilitary system of action and communication

established by Roger Moore, Walker Taylor, and other leaders held sway. Plans for establishing headquarters, safe houses for family members, access to wagons and trains, among other details, had been worked out and thoroughly understood well before the election. Once the violence was initiated on the tenth, the plan fell smoothly into place from the riot alarm being sounded at the first shots, to the guard details on every block that "interviewed" all blacks who tried to pass, and to the transfer of control over the city to military forces.² As a result of the governor's call for service, guard units from Maxton, Clinton, and Kinston arrived throughout the late evening and into the night with Taylor assigning the units to guard duty or patrol in various parts of the city. Colonel Taylor, given charge of the city by the governor and state adjutant general, instituted martial law around 2:30 in the afternoon and demanded that all blacks be off the streets before nightfall. Taylor's second in command, Colonel George Morton of the Naval Reserves, was ordered to enforce the curfew. He made his home at 720 North Fourth Street, his base of operations. As many as 400 special policemen were deputized to assist the military units in place in the city.³ The day

¹ For example, John S. Cunningham of Person County invited Waddell's kinswoman, Rebecca Cameron, and her husband to Thanksgiving dinner at his home so that they could "thank our Father, who has blessed us individually in so many ways, we can thank him for the great victory on the 8th day of November." Another letter to Benehan Cameron, from Thomas Strange of Wilmington, thanked Cameron for his telegram offering assistance during the riot. Strange closed with a note for Cameron to pay the telegram fee because he needed to save every cent. John S. Cunningham to Col. and Mrs. Benehan Cameron, November 11, 1898 and Thomas Strange to Ben, November 16, 1898, Benehan Cameron Papers, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

² Patrols established in advance of the riot took on a new responsibility as all blacks passing through the city were met on every corner by a checkpoint that would "hold up and search all negroes going and coming from work." J. F. Maunder recalled that he searched about 25 blacks and found nothing of consequence. "Minutes of the Association of the WLL," North Carolina Collection.

³ For information on Moore's activities and the network of guards and patrols, see previous chapters. About 60 Maxton Guards arrived around 11:00 P.M., 40 Clinton Guards arrived a half hour later, and 30 men with the Kinston Naval Reserves arrived at 2:30